

Regional Facilities and Infrastructure Plan

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1. Executive Summary

a. The Goal of This Document

This document is designed to be the facilities and infrastructure plan for staff, board members, stakeholders and partners of Valley Regional Transit (VRT). This document is designed to be a complimentary asset to ValleyConnect 2.0 (VC 2.0), the regional public transportation plan for the Treasure Valley. As VRT grows and expands to serve more and more of Ada and Canyon counties the facilities and infrastructure assets that VRT has invested in or helps to maintain continue to grow as well. As VRT grows, the direction of investment in new properties or additional facilities also needs structure and direction as well. Elements that VRT will add to its services, such as rail or fixed guideway need guidance as well.

b. Structure of the Document

This document will give an overview of VRT's existing assets and organizational structure then define future investment areas of opportunity and possible threat areas. An overview of VRT's governmental structure and position in the valley is also important to understand. VRT's facilities as they stand today and areas to which they likely will need to expand to will be discussed, as well as transfer facilities, premium corridors and fixed guideway corridors.

2. VRT Overview

a. History of VRT

Valley Regional Transit was created by the voters of the Treasure Valley in 1999, voted into existence in order to create a Regional Public Transportation Authority for Ada and Canyon Counties. VRT is responsible for delivering and supporting public transportation for those two counties.

b. Vested or Owned Assets (Facilities)

In 2011 VRT did not own a significant number of facilities. VRT operated the majority of buses at a ground lease site for the primary Ada County maintenance facility with an additional two leased properties (one for administration staff and one for Canyon County operations). By 2016 VRT had purchased three additional properties and renovated or assisted in the construction of numerous additional transit related sites. Today VRT has an administration site in Meridian, large multi-use facility in Canyon County and a new transit and transfer site in downtown Boise in addition to the Boise Maintenance Facility. VRT now operates out of four facilities in the valley.

The largest operational property is the maintenance facility at 4788 Orchard (the Orchard facility). At the Orchard facility VRT maintains a ground lease from the Boise Airport (located adjacent to the facility) for the eight acres the site covers, and owns the buildings and equipment on the property. The site includes a large eight bay shop, staff offices, a fueling island and an enclosed bus wash. Parking for approximately seventy buses and thirty staff spaces exist in the current paved parking area.

In downtown Boise VRT owns condo space as part of a large building complex. In this condo space is the downtown transfer center, Main Street Station. It includes eight bus

transfer bays, a customer service center, public restrooms, conditioned and covered public waiting areas and a small police office.

In Meridian VRT owns condominium space for administration offices in the same building as the metropolitan planning association. These offices include several conference rooms including space for public board meetings and staff offices.

In Caldwell VRT owns a public transfer facility and maintenance shop combined at one site. It includes staff offices, a customer service center, public restrooms, conditioned and covered public waiting areas and a large maintenance area with four large bus repair bays and six small bus repair bays.

c. Transit Asset Management Infrastructure

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has invested through VRT in numerous assets located throughout the valley in order to build, stimulate, assist or improve transit functionality. In general these types of assets are owned and maintained by other agencies or entities but were wholly or in the majority paid for by FTA dollars. In general these are significant transfer centers, including the Boise Towne Square Mall, the College of Western Idaho (CWI) Park and Ride, the Middleton Park and Ride, the Emmett Park and Ride and the Boise State University transit center. Because of the amount of FTA investment in these sites, VRT scores these facilities in the same manner as VRT owned facilities due to the possibility that future FTA investment may be needed to upgrade, improve or replace these assets.

d. Partnered Assets

VRT has also worked with numerous other agencies and entities to create or improve existing assets. Such assets have obtained FTA investment in some part or have been built to assist or support transit or public transportation. These assets include transit supportive bus stop concrete and transit amenities, transit supportive bike lanes or sidewalk improvements or other assets that have been built to support public transportation. In general these assets are not scored in a similar fashion as other VRT equipment or facilities, but may include important assets, such as transit shelters and bus stops that need continuous improvement and care. While VRT in general does not own the supporting land or concrete, VRT often has to invest notable funds to keep this level of the transit network in an operable and functional state.

e. Future Assets

VRT faces a dire need to expand to serve the public in its areas of operation. Many areas face a notable lack of service or have no service at all. VRT is also notably lacking in comparable assets to peer agencies or cities. As such, VRT's goals as laid out in VC 2.0 show a need for many areas to grow or expand. These growth areas proposed include possible Fixed Guideways including rail, circulator services or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), improved bus stop assets, additional facilities, additional park and ride/transfer centers, more shelters and passenger amenities or additional equipment.

3. Maintenance Facilities

a. Orchard Maintenance Facility

The Orchard facility is located to the south and west of the Boise Airport and Gowen Field. The Airport owns the 8 acres of ground the site sits on, with VRT holding a long

term lease and owning the equipment and facilities located at the site. The original lease was created in 2005 when the City of Boise deeded the improvements on the site to VRT, but not the land. VRT recently updated the first original 20 year lease, and is now in its second 20 year lease of the space. The building was built for city bus services before VRT's inception. The fuel island was built around the time that VRT took ownership of the site. There are approximately 2 acres of unfinished area on the site, with the remaining area paved. The existing drainage system surface flows to drainage ponds. The site is fully fenced with access control to all perimeter vehicle gates and the majority of the small staff doors on the site. The site includes security cameras, a bus wash, a large maintenance shop and staff offices. Recent improvements in the site include the security elements, bus wash motors and washing equipment, fall protection systems, updated HVAC equipment in the shop and a new Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) detection system. VRT estimates that it has over twenty million dollars of improvements or upgrades at this site.

There are a number of high value strengths at the site include its close proximity to the interstate, its relative industrial neighborhood, the existing facilities already located on the property, and the improvements done to those facilities. The fuel island and shop are particularly valuable to the transit network. The site is also located on a major arterial leading directly to the downtown core and the interstate, with close proximity to three heavily used routes.

While there are a large number of strengths at the site there are also a large number of weaknesses or issues of concern. These issues include future proposed changes to the arterial (Orchard Street) expected in coming years. It is expected to be rerouted and changed to be a direct southerly route to new subdivisions in the Maple Grove and Lake Hazel area. This change will make it somewhat more difficult to get transit vehicles out to the rest of the city in a quick and efficient manner.

The fact that the land is not owned by VRT is also a significant challenge and weakness. For the first twenty years the cost of the land was \$30,000 per year. At the renewal period in 2015 the new rate was \$100,000 per year. This means that over the 20 year life of the lease, VRT will pay twice the current market value of \$1,000,000 to the Boise Airport. It should be expected that at the next renewal period VRT would face another staggering price increase, similar to what occurred in 2015. VRT also faces the very high likelihood that the airport will not renew the lease, or will ask VRT to vacate the property when the need for additional taxiway or runway space is needed. The VRT facility space is currently within the footprint of the airport's future expansion plans.

Also of considerable concern at the facility is the amount of usable space and the type of equipment on site. Currently, the existing vehicle parking space is almost completely filled, with a constant concern for vehicle space something that staff works with daily. To invest in the unfinished area and provide additional space, VRT would need to be able to confirm that the Airport will not be able to limit the long term use VRT needs. Then VRT would need to pave the additional areas on the property at considerable expense. This would give VRT the ability to provide just under double

the amount of large transit vehicle parking area that the site currently holds. This amount sounds like a lot, but would really only provide about as much space as VRT would need to provide the intermediate level of service noted in VC 2.0, not necessarily the total future needs VRT should be considering. The Orchard facility alone will not be able to house and service the number of vehicles needed for the growth scenario described in VC 2.0.

In order to maximize the amount of pavement and parking at the site the remaining unfinished area would need to be renovated and paved over. This level of effort should include drainage adjustments for the total site, making the effort comfortably over the million dollar project level. While this new paved area would be a welcome improvement, the existing pavement throughout the site has not been sealed in many years. At this point, it will take a notable and concerted sealing effort (large patch reconstruction and crack repair as well as sealcoating every two to three years) to catch the existing pavement back up to speed with a new section of paved parking.

VRT also has a large number of aging and high mileage equipment on site. The fuel island has two compressors, providing CNG fuel to the buses in a fast fuel situation. These two compressors currently are in need of replacement due to age, but even new, they only provide the amount fuel for the current number of CNG buses. A minimum of a third new compressor would be needed to notably expand the amount of fueling done on site. At the last cost estimation, these compressors cost in excess of \$650,000 each.

One last minor item which should be noted as a challenge is the current drainage system on site. It operates using surface flow, with large rain events allowing overflow or excess waters to leave the site for County drainage systems. This situation requires a large amount of staff maintenance, as VRT or whoever is working on the site is required to regularly document notable rain events and even do water testing and sampling in some cases to avoid violating environmental regulations.

The site has a large and functioning place in the current transit network of today, but any notable future investments should be carefully weighed against the possibility that the Orchard site cannot be the main or only transit maintenance site for the greater Boise area. Any new investments should be considered as elements that could go at a new site, or at additional sites, should they become available. In light of the growth scenario in VC 2.0 options for additional facilities should be entertained in the near future. The growth scenario will more than double the amount of facility space needed for repair and maintenance as well as vehicle parking.

i. Renewable Energy Sources

VRT has made the decision to transition its fleet to electric buses, which require their own new infrastructure and footprint, as well as significant investment, all of which hang under the cloud of future airport expansion. While the first and foremost facility that faces the challenge of renewable energy sources will most likely be the Orchard facility, *the following discussion applies to any VRT facility*, such as the Canyon County maintenance shop or the meridian admin facility.

Since VRT has opted to move to electric buses, there is a need to implement renewable energy sources like wind and solar wherever possible. Other agencies around the country have found the need to implement any energy cost mitigation measures available to keep electric bus operational costs low, as well as providing options or alternatives to fossil fuel use. In general, this means solar, as wind is only a low cost energy provider to large scale energy providers as an optional investment opportunity. Solar use on residential properties in the Treasure Valley is currently growing at a very fast pace, with commercial, industrial and government users in the minority. That is not to say that it is not a good option for government or commercial entities, but current tax incentives make the residential market far more robust. Entities like VRT though, that expect to massively increase the amount of power they consume will face large electric costs if they do not try to implement some sort of renewable energy source as part of moving a fleet to all electric. Improvements at any site in the future should consider incorporating renewable energy sources into improvements wherever possible.

The current local power provider, Idaho Power, is currently working through the public utilities commission to make it harder to use net metering. Net metering is used as a way to mitigate energy costs by owners of solar or other renewable energy sources. Owners such as businesses and home that have some sort of renewable energy source such as solar or wind can currently ‘net’ their annual use, allowing what they generate during peak sun hours – such as during the day, while homeowners are at work – count against the energy used at night, while they are home, on a net annual basis. Federal law requires public utilities to provide some level of ‘net’ renewable benefit, but current federal code does not spell out exactly how local utilities are required to do that, so changes to net metering rules spelled out by the public utilities commission could adversely affect VRT’s ability to lower energy costs through renewables. VRT and partner board members should move quickly to work with the public utilities commission to keep net policies as friendly to renewable owners as possible.

As VRT moves to a full electric fleet though, it should be noted that while renewables will help lower costs, the amount of solar or wind needed to eliminate all of VRT’s expected energy costs would be astronomical, and very difficult to obtain. A covered shop over all vehicles currently on the site completely covered with solar panels including covering all available maintenance shop roof space would not eliminate or balance out the energy costs that an electric fleet would need. Also of note is the fact that transit vehicles, especially in the Treasure Valley, run during the day, and cannot be charged during that time, at least not at the Orchard facility for the most part. As such, a ‘net’ use situation is the only way VRT could balance out its needs for energy with the resources it could create with renewable energy sources. Current limits set by Idaho Power do not allow huge solar arrays beyond a certain size, so eliminating electrical costs on a net use basis is very unlikely.

That is not to say that VRT should not implement some level of renewables, wherever possible. It is highly likely that VRT’s regular staff and maintenance shop electrical

use during the day is high enough to justify some level of solar or wind, whether a ‘net’ condition exists with Idaho Power or not. All renewable sources are beneficial to VRT, whether they cover or wipe out the power bill or not. Any amount of renewable source provided, can most likely be put to immediate use, for good purposes, and should be entertained. It should also be noted that as the renewable industry expands and becomes more prevalent, energy storage devices such as home and facility batteries become less expensive and more available, making the need to triage the incoming and outgoing energy with a public utility less of a challenge. In early discussions with electric bus vendors, many options exist to entertain battery storage or battery refurbishment to mitigate energy use and high energy costs.

Many transit centers have found that electric buses, especially those with fast charging roof equipment need weather protection and have moved to storing and parking vehicles inside of closed facilities or at a minimum, under awning type covers. These additional features provide much needed real estate for solar infrastructure and charging or at a minimum, the protection to keep vehicle status and appearance in good shape for as long as possible. Nothing like this exists or is planned at this time for the Orchard facility, but should be considered.

a. Happy Day Transit Center

The Happy Day Transit Center (HDTC) was built in the mid-eighties as a car lot. It changed hands several times, was added to and renovated several times before it went vacant around 2008. When VRT purchased the site in 2013 it had sat vacant for a number of years and was in severe disrepair. At that time VRT was moving out of a single bay repair shop in an industrial area with no on-site bus parking, no public facilities and limited staff space, so the HDTC was a significant step up in facility size and space. It needed significant upgrades and renovation though. Upon moving in, VRT upgraded the shop to meet compliance needs for working on CNG buses. Over subsequent years VRT upgraded the parking lot and to a minor extent the interior waiting area, the customer service area and staff offices. The site includes bus repair bays for four large buses and six small or cutaway bus bays. It has a small customer service area, a large public waiting area with public restrooms, a large public covered waiting area outside, a bus loading area with room for five buses, staff parking, park and ride parking, and room for forty five large buses to be parked outside. The site also includes staff offices and conference rooms as well as a large unused section of shop currently used as a storage area.

The facility is located on an arterial road, Cleveland Blvd, and is equidistant from the centers of both of the largest towns in Canyon County – Nampa and Caldwell. It is also located within three hundred yards of the primary rail corridor for the County. The location includes access to a traffic light for ingress and egress of large vehicles onto the arterial, which greatly aids the process of large vehicles coming and going from the site. The arterial includes sidewalk and pedestrian connections to both adjacent cities, even though the area is somewhat industrial. It should also be noted that there is a symbolic aspect of progress and positive change in the process of taking a car lot and converting it to a transit center that has not gone unnoticed by partners and the public.

The shop space is almost as large as the shop space in Boise, although the smaller vehicle doors on the front of the shop limit the amount of large vehicle space. The public waiting area is far larger than needed for the current service level, and the staff areas provide more offices than generally would be needed for the amount of service out of that area. The parking lot is also far larger than is currently used, and very new, having been reconstructed in 2017. VRT estimates that it has over three million dollars of improvements or upgrades at this site.

While there is a large amount of growing room at the facility and a number of positive site aspects, it's important to note that the facility was built well over thirty years ago and many of the elements of the space show that age and are in need regular repair and upkeep. These items are generally smaller in scale, but taken as a whole, have a combined effect, making the facility seem quite maintenance and upkeep intensive.

The roof has many areas that leak from time to time, and a notable amount of maintenance work and funds go to keeping those minor issues repaired. To replace the roof would be several hundred thousand dollars and would require asbestos mitigation as part of the reconstruction. A rooftop renovation effort rather than a full replacement could be entertained, and would reconstruct the surface area of the roof including encapsulating any asbestos material. Also needed is the replacement of the aging and out of date HVAC equipment currently located on the roof.

The drainage system off of the roof often fills full of bird refuse or other trash, overflows and creates additional leak areas. When the drainage systems fill up or freezes, it creates cascading issues of ice in the passenger waiting areas or broken pipes within the covered awning or support columns.

The awning over the exterior passenger waiting area suffered during the unoccupied years and has several areas where the awning soffit cover panels are missing. Many of the lights in the soffit area are broken beyond repair or don't have covers creating an eyesore and maintenance issue.

The interior and exterior doors are also thirty years old and have difficulty sealing and closing tightly or smoothly and require notable repair and maintenance. When the ground shifts slightly with changing seasons the doors will jam open or closed, creating nuisance issues or security problems if the doors don't close tightly.

The facility was purchased and initially renovated using federal grant dollars and a number of smaller and varied match sources like a rebate for using CNG vehicles. Funds for larger repair efforts take a number of years to cobble together with local match often being a troubling or difficult aspect to secure. Due to this funding situation and the high cost of installation, a fueling system was not included in any of the major renovations to date. As such, staff and vehicles need to travel to the other side of Nampa to fuel at a commercial CNG fueling station or go all the way to the Boise Maintenance Facility on Orchard to refuel.

Since VRT is transitioning to an electric fleet, fuel island improvements or additions should be forgone in favor of electric infrastructure improvements, should the surrounding communities support that level of improvement. Prior to any expansion efforts at the site though, the long and varied list of maintenance and upkeep items should be addressed.

While Cleveland Blvd is generally accepted as one of if not the largest arterials between Caldwell and Nampa, the site is located several miles from interstate access. Service out of the site includes a large number of inter-county service routes, requiring quick access to the interstate in order to remain viable. These types of routes often struggle to maintain on-time performance due to traffic on the corridor.

While many of the site issues are somewhat minor in scope, it should be noted that one of the largest challenges to date is obtaining match dollars to pair with federal dollars for these repairs and projects. While prospects for future investment into capital maintenance and improvement from the adjoining partner cities remains high and VRT is optimistic that solutions can be found, all future investment and growth surrounding the facility needs to be tempered with the harsh reality that the surrounding cities simply may not be ready for the investment and level of service VRT hopes for.

The facility as it stands today will most likely be able to handle the service and staff levels needed for VC 2.0's intermediate scenario. It is unclear if the facility will be large and functional enough to handle the system needs for the growth scenario. It certainly will not be able to handle the growth scenario included in VC 2.0 without resolving the plethora of issues noted above.

In the future, especially because of its growth potential and location near and arterial and a rail corridor, this site should be considered an anchor to public transportation in Canyon County and invested in as such.

b. Boise State Maintenance Facility

The Boise State Maintenance Facility is located on the campus of Boise State University, near the eastern corner of Bronco Ln and University Drive. The facility is owned and operated by Boise State University. It includes three vehicle bays that are not large enough to fit a shuttle bus into. Shuttle bus maintenance and service work is completed outside the existing repair bays.

The only reason this facility is included here as part of VRT's Regional Facilities and Infrastructure Plan is because VRT has invested in other infrastructure on Campus, and this site is currently the location of all Boise State shuttle repair and maintenance. Boise State's shuttle service currently operates around the campus and through other areas of town to satellite campus locations, providing a substantial amount of rides and service to the community. VRT has assisted Boise State on numerous occasions with the purchase of shuttles using FTA funds that come through VRT. Boise State currently serves and assists VRT with providing rides from campus to downtown and other areas of the city. The amount of rides provided by the Boise State shuttle service, while not anywhere near as large as the VRT service in the city of Boise is still significant. The shuttle service is a valuable part of the transit network in Boise.

The maintenance facility in question is well over fifty years old. It does not have ceiling height or door width clearance to accommodate standard shuttle buses. It does not have sufficient staff and mechanic accommodations for full time service and repair. It does not have sufficient storage and disposal room to complete even the barest of service schedules. It is in dire need of renovation or replacement. Staff at the University has estimated that they will need in excess of three million dollars to replace or renovate the facility.

It cannot be overlooked however, that Boise State University currently operates and manages their shuttle system without VRT influence. While VRT has provided federal funds for a large number of shuttle bus purchases, Boise State still owns those assets and is responsible for their care and maintenance. It should also be noted that Boise State is an incredibly large and complex university, with an immense budget and substantial funding resources. For VRT to provide notable funds for a new or renovated facility to an organization with those types of resources would seem to be a poor allocation of VRT's limited resources, especially with the large amount of maintenance backlog that VRT currently holds.

VRT has partnered with Boise State in a limited fashion in the past on vehicle purchases, and currently lists and scores elements of the maintenance facility on the asset management listings, including a possible facility replacement, but should be very cautious in the future with giving large fund allocations to an organization as resource rich as the largest university in the state. It is expected that VRT will continue to entertain shuttle purchase assistance. As far as facilities and infrastructure however, VRT will most likely limit its assistance to minor equipment and facility work as part of regional asset scoring.

c. Boise Bikeshare Facility

Since 2014 VRT has supported and overseen the Boise Bikeshare program, called Boise Greenbike (BGB). BGB is a small entity, employing just 3 full time employees and managing the region's bikeshare assets. From their inception, this small group has leased small sites near downtown, currently operating out of a small facility in Garden City. As this system grows, VRT should continue to look for a suitable home for this group, near where they operate.

d. Additional Future Sites

When considering locations for future expansion as opportunities arise, care should be taken to consider the entire region, future route paths and growth in the valley. Locations situated in areas not currently served should be highly regarded, such as northwest or southwest Boise. Areas adjacent to or near rail corridors should be considered, as well as areas with easy access to arterial travel space. Quality pedestrian amenities are a requirement for facilities that will have a public component, but are not generally required for maintenance-only sites. With VC 2.0 as a guiding path, property acquisition adjacent to or nearby existing facilities should also be entertained. This will allow existing facilities to continue to be viable and useful as service expands on a notable scale. Complimentary properties that could enhance existing assets such as unused property adjacent to the rail corridor near the administration offices in Meridian, property around the Humane Society in Caldwell near the rail corridor and

behind the HDTC or property around the Horse Park across from the College of Western Idaho park and ride are all examples of property that would all serve the future public transportation network.

As part of the adjustment of Orchard Street the City also has several unused properties nearby or adjacent to the existing VRT maintenance facility. One idea the city had was to use one of those properties as a solar farm. If VRT needs expansion space and is interested in installing solar to supplement or assist with electric bus charging costs and also would provide awning or shop space upon which to place solar, a mutual solution can be investigated or at least discussed.

While Ada County generally is heavily vested in public space use, especially for pedestrians and cyclists, Canyon County still seems to be vested in single occupant vehicle use. When planning for additional facilities, especially multi-use facilities similar to the HDTC where pedestrians, cyclists, transit and transit vehicle maintenance can all converge at one site, Ada County will generally optimize or use that kind of space more effectively, while Canyon County generally favors park and ride and partial vehicle use facilities while they transition from a semi-rural environment to a more built out and crowded situation.

While it seems an unending problem fixing items that age or wear out, it needs to be factored and emphasized early on that property acquisition in usable areas needs to be an active part of an expanding transit systems balance of projects.

4. Transit Centers / Transfer Locations

a. Main Street Station

Main Street Station (MSS) is an underground bus transfer facility located at the corner of W. Main Street and Capital Blvd underneath the City Center Plaza. It has eight transfer bays as well as room for up to five additional buses on Main Street in the overflow transfer zone. Sixteen routes currently serve the space, with room for additional routes depending on frequency. It includes covered and conditioned waiting areas, as well as additional space for waiting and loading at each bay. It contains customer services for riders, public restrooms, a bike storage room, a small police office and minimal staff space. The facility is not used as a bus storage and parking area and is closed and secured at the end of each day.

Main Street Station was created to alleviate several issues and problems in the downtown core. In 1987 the downtown bus mall project created, improved or restored four blocks of on-street bus parking including installing numerous bus shelters, plaza style sidewalks, street furniture and other improvements. As part of that project, the four blocks in question were deemed the downtown bus mall, with all on-street parking in those areas dedicated to transit vehicles only. The City, the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) and the urban renewal district – the Capital City Development Corporation (CCDC) all cooperated and coordinated on the downtown bus mall. All entities contributed to the bus mall construction along with several million dollars of FTA funds. It was completed in 1989.

By 2004 several issues with the bus mall situation had become apparent, necessitating a new facility. Because of the large distance needed to traverse the four block bus mall from one end to the other, transfers were often impossible, especially for persons with mobility challenges. Businesses in the area were not happy with large vehicles constantly parked in front of their frontage, limiting or eliminating public parking. Riders and staff had no public restrooms or customer service facilities. Bus shelters, while helpful in stopping rain or snow, did little to protect riders from weather events.

VRT worked with the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Treasure Valley, called the Community Planning Association of Southern Idaho (COMPASS) along with congressional support and many other supporters and partners to obtain funds for a new downtown facility. In 2006 several million dollars were awarded to VRT and after an extensive property evaluation over many years and a very long construction period, Main Street Station was built adjacent to the existing bus mall, at Main Street and Capital Blvd and opened in 2016.

The facility strengths are numerous. It is bright, inviting, filled with public art, and kept very clean. It includes all of the amenities lacking from the downtown bus mall, such as customer service space, public restrooms, conditioned and overflow waiting areas, and very short transfer distances. It keeps the buses out of the street and away from street level commerce and it is patrolled by security. The police use the space throughout the day and after hours providing an additional level of security and safety. The facility is also located in the center of the downtown core, ideally situated for commerce and access to the center of town. It is also new, with minimal items aging out to replacement at this time. The facility is also in a good position to implement future electric fast charging stations, should the need arise, with a drop ceiling covering a large utility space where charging infrastructure could be installed. VRT estimates that it has in excess of twelve million dollars of improvements or upgrades invested into this site.

One of the main items of concern is the cost to operate the facility. In order to secure the site, it had to be constructed as part of a larger complex. While VRT owns and controls the space, VRT is also by default a member of the larger condominium association for the complex. This requires cooperation of overlapping uses that need to be taken into account when planning for operational changes, staff use and site maintenance. The facility is also located underground, which has benefits, but also drawbacks. Being underground means that temperature fluctuations above ground are mitigated to some extent, but also means that groundwater and subgrade issues are something to constantly be aware of and avoided. The site is also complex to operate in. Wedged into one of the more highly traveled vehicle corridors, VRT operates special signal lights to empty the facility, and created a one block section of two way road where a one way arterial used to exist. The facility is located in one of the most heavily traveled pedestrian areas of downtown, often drawing large numbers of passers-by who litter, vandalize and abuse elements of the facility after hours.

The security costs for the site are based upon what is needed to keep things safe and is considerable, as well as the cost to clean the site on a regular basis. These costs are far

more than is spent on those types of items at other VRT sites. The amount of rider traffic (estimated to be at more than half a million annual trips through the site by 2020) though, warrants more attention than any other VRT site. At the current scheduling levels, VRT buses will pass through the site over eighty thousand times per year, necessitating constant vigilance and concern to keep contractors, maintenance workers, VRT staff, condo association workers and others from slowing down or hampering bus operations at the site.

Another issue is the fact that no VRT staff are permanently located at the site, to watch over the facility, operations or security. For several hours each day in the morning and evening, the facility is basically manned by hourly security patrols and the sporadic attention of drivers operating in and out of the site, leaving a very costly asset somewhat unguarded through those times. The site is somewhat high profile, so issues during those times could still create a public embarrassment to the agency.

The facility opens with the first buses to arrive, just after five am. The last bus to leave the site is just after ten pm. That creates a window of almost seventeen hours per day that the public and riders can enter the site, for nuisance purposes or otherwise. Customer service staff are on site from seven am to six pm, leaving the site without a dedicated representative for extended amounts of time. When customer service staff are on site, there is generally no dedicated supervisor or floor warden to guarantee that in the event of a fire or need for an evacuation that all members of the public are ushered out of the site, especially riders or members of the public who have mobility challenges.

Lastly, the site is located in the downtown core, with numerous surrounding activities and levels of involvement from various different sources. This can be a significant challenge to transit operations and staff. The plaza style sidewalks are often full of people, making operations difficult around various levels of awareness from the public. Numerous bars and restaurants surround the downtown core, and at certain times of the day on certain days of the week, pedestrians in the area have a good chance of some level of inebriation, requiring constant vigilance from security and operators. The entrance and exit ramp configurations were approved by the ACHD, with priority given to bus traffic, but vehicle traffic has a high chance of backing up around the site if bus operations are not smoothly executed. Parking in the site is limited and the chance for conflict between VRT staff, police vehicles and maintenance staff or contractors is growing.

In the future the site will need more specific attention by staff, with additional bodies to keep it safe as operational time and frequencies expand. While space to expand or build onto the facility simply does not exist in the downtown core, the need for careful coordination of what occurs in the site is required for the site to remain functional. As the network and area that VRT serves expands the already complex and challenged downtown core routes will not necessarily be added to, with limits on the physical space already choked down, but VRT will continue to maximize the amount of use transit vehicles get out of the site, including Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service coming to the site and even fixed guideway service occurring nearby or to the street level of

the site. All future work in and around the area should plan for these levels of improvement and service. This includes possible minor changes to concrete loading bays inside of the site and at street level as well as coordination of plans for circulator type service through the downtown core.

b. Boise Towne Square

The Boise Towne Square (BTS) transfer location is a large loading and unloading area located in the north parking area of the Boise Towne Square Mall situated near Interstate 84 and Cole roads towards the western side of Boise. Eight routes currently serve the transfer location at this site. The property the improvements sit on is owned by the Boise Towne Square Mall, with VRT owning and maintaining the two large shelters and signage at the site.

The site is ideally located for transfers with ample space for six buses to park and load/unload at one time. Ample parking is available for riders who wish to park and ride, and the shelters are large and sturdy.

As with any transfer location though, passengers and the public who have no oversight have less than suitable manners and don't necessarily treat each other well, with smoking, inebriation and poor behavior being common complaints about the site from riders to VRT staff. Since there is no oversight, VRT has a very difficult time enforcing and correcting any of this behavior. There are also no customer service facilities at this site and no public restrooms.

Another minor issue of concern is ownership of the ground and space. VRT obtained rights to use the space for a transfer center with the buildout of phase II of the mall back in the early nineties as part of the Conditional Use Permit for the mall improvements. While it is highly unlikely that VRT's use of the space could ever be challenged or revoked, it is not secure. While it is unlikely that VRT will be able to obtain ownership of all transfer locations, it does limit the ability to perform improvements, make changes or adjust amenities on the site. Mall ownership and management personnel changes from time to time making it difficult to obtain regular contacts for improvements or issue resolution.

c. Boise State Student Union Building

In 2010 VRT funded a portion of the improvements done at the Boise State Student Union Building (SUB), including improvements to the transit center area of the building, adjacent University Blvd. The site includes a small desk and map area adjacent to the information office inside the SUB, large and elaborate shelters outside along with a loading bay, concrete steps, benches and plaza space, planters and bike racks. Four VRT routes along with several of the Boise State shuttle routes use the space.

The transfers at the site provide a comfortable and functional transfer point between shuttle routes and VRT routes, including inter-county routes to Canyon County and west Boise. It serves as a vital coordination point between a diverse set of transportation options, being located very near the river greenbelt and several bike share options.

The site is also relatively new, with high quality improvements in place. It receives a high level of repair and care, being located at the front door of the SUB, a location the university fosters as a selling point.

The site was heavily invested in by VRT during construction in order to create an anchor and waypoint for the transit network. As such, VRT regularly scores the site on its list of assets to manage, should the need come to replace or renovate any aspect of the site. However, similar to the situation that exists at the Boise State maintenance facility, the site is owned by a large and well-funded university with resources far in excess of VRT. It would be wise to avoid funding any major improvements or renovations at the site without taking the comparison between the two partner agencies into account.

One final item of concern is the University's master plan, which proposed closing all of University Drive to vehicular traffic, making this site unreachable by transit vehicle. While the phase of implementing that full change is not expected until well into the future, it should be noted that transit may have a difficult time recouping the millions of dollars spent investing in the site, not to mention any improvements done. It is unfortunate that transit, including the shuttle system, does not hold a stronger foothold through the University.

d. Additional Future Sites

VRT stands in need of a number of high quality transfer sites as the transit network expands. The ability to improve satellite transfer sites like the BTS and the SUB becomes more and more important as the network grows and expands. Space to improve and expand facilities and infrastructure at the core of a dense network simply does not exist, and ring routes, satellite sites and transfer facilities further away from the core of the network need to be invested in and improved as the spider web of bus routes expands. Sites near the Boise Depot, Micron, the Village in Meridian, Ten Mile Crossing in Meridian, State Street in Eagle, near the interstate or rail corridor in Caldwell or similar sites should be considered and pursued as necessary additional assets as the network expands. Property values will only increase, and should be looked into as a standard part of the network development.

5. Park & Rides

a. Middleton

In 2017 VRT partnered with the City of Middleton to create a park and ride accessed by the then route 44 as part of a larger redevelopment and creation of a city park in downtown Middleton. Construction was completed and the park and ride was in use when in 2019 other factors along the corridor necessitated the closure and cancellation of the route. The site is still available to be served by VRT's vanpool partner, ACHD Commuteride and the site provides a much needed pedestrian and cyclist improvement area in the core of this small city. Many lessons from this partnership and development should be remembered, when investing in park and ride locations.

While a struggling route often recovers and becomes a mainstay for a transit network, it is often difficult to foresee the level of service and length of time that may be necessary in order for a route to maintain viability. In order to avoid the impression of

a wasted investment, multiple uses should be fostered and partnered for all sites wherever possible, as was done at this site.

The Middleton Park and Ride was majority paid for with FTA dollars. As such and even though transit service does not pass through the site, VRT continues to score the site on its asset listing should the route re-start or improvements be necessary. As the site is still used in a small way for public transportation it should be monitored and maintained according to the license agreement the city agreed to before construction.

VRT does not own any of the land at the site, and once the improvements were completed, ownership was passed to the City, with the agreement spelled out in the license agreement that the City would keep the site in good repair, including maintenance, landscaping and snow removal as needed. Should the City wish to sell or re-use the space for a non-public transportation purpose, the non-depreciated value of the improvements may need to be refunded to the FTA or transferred to a new site provided by the City.

The site is well positioned, in good condition and serves a multitude of varied uses. It should remain an anchor for the northwest portion of the valley, even though fixed route transit does not currently travel through that area.

b. College of Western Idaho Park and Ride

Similar to the Middleton Park and Ride, VRT partnered with a local entity to provide design and construction elements to a piece of property that was not owned by VRT, but that could be licensed to VRT for transit use. The park and ride was built on the southwest quadrant of the main College of Western Idaho (CWI) campus in Nampa off of Idaho Center Blvd. The site is well maintained (by the college) and provides reasonably short and quick access to the interstate, arterial access into Meridian and Nampa and reasonably good pedestrian access to surrounding homes and businesses.

Site strengths include a large, simple and well laid out parking area that is well lit and provides quality shelters and benches as well as bike racks. The site is within reasonable walking distance of the main campus buildings, and while only two routes currently serve the site, an additional three routes can be accessed at surrounding stops within reasonable walking distance. The site is a valuable asset to the college, being used outside of transit hours for parking for events and sporting activities.

This site is also located within a half mile of Franklin Blvd, a future high use corridor for VRT (in VC 2.0) and immediately adjacent to the rail corridor that traverses the center of the two county area.

Some concerns about the site include the fact that only two routes currently serve the site, which is somewhat of an internal operations issue, but is tied to site concerns. The current approach at Birch puts buses into a tight two lane approach road that large transit vehicles have a difficult time traversing without rolling over the curb. The roadway is simply not wide enough in that area. The two lane approach also leads the buses through a roundabout that is poorly designed, causing students and passenger

vehicles to turn or travel the wrong direction through the roundabout, creating a possible accident situation for buses.

VRT reached out to the university to be able to coordinate with them for improvements to the approach and roundabout. VRT had programmed additional dollars to improve the bus pathway into the park and ride, but leadership at the university decided not to move forward with those improvements, even after VRT had worked extensively on preliminary design and environmental approvals.

While it serves as a key anchor for service in Nampa and it should be considered as a vital asset in the transit network, it may struggle to be improved or updated in the future. Caution should be taken before undertaking any major improvements at the site.

c. Northpointe Park and Ride

In 2016 Northpointe Development asked VRT to partner with them and ITD to complete a large development near the corner of State Street and Glenwood/Gary Lane. The developer was not allowed to create a new approach for the development off of State Street without a maintenance agreement for the landscaping and pedestrian improvements along the frontage of the site. ITD will not contract with a private entity for maintenance, so the developer worked with VRT to partner with ITD for maintenance while the developer partnered with VRT to perform the maintenance ITD would require. In return for this the developer agreed to provide several pedestrian improvements to the area including space for park and ride services in a small parking lot near the area.

These new improvements were used by VRT to create a more amenable shelter and bench at a high traffic bus stop, as well as connect the entire area with quality sidewalk and bike lanes. The park and ride space was extremely limited though, with only ten spaces being provided for a limited amount of years. The developer has also signed the area with parking restrictions that do not make the area appear as a transit friendly amenity to riders through the area.

While VRT is working with the developer to assure that the space can be used effectively and for a notable amount of time, it is not generally a high quality transit amenity that VRT feels has been built to necessary standards.

Also of note is the location of these amenities, as they fall at the end of the most frequent and well-traveled route in the system. Notable development exists in the area, and this location is expected to be at the end of one of the first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) sections in Boise. The area is part of a high priority corridor for VRT, and should be focused on for future development whenever possible.

d. Elder Street Park and Ride

Boise State University obtained state transportation improvement dollars in 2013 for a park and ride to be built on a piece of property near the Vista exit on Elder Street. The goal was to create a place to park and store their shuttle buses and also to create an off campus park and ride for students especially with parking challenges on campus. Due to neighborhood concerns and other issues, Boise State opted to require a permit to be

able to park in the park and ride. Even though the permit is free, the site has generally seen little to no use by the public and very little use from students. This may be the fault of the permit, the high crime in the area or the fact that its location is not situated to the west, where the majority of the valley comes from if they are commuting long distance to downtown. Whatever the factor is, the site has seen very little optimization.

VRT has not specifically invested in or obtained ownership or rights to the site though, so the risk of lost investment isn't necessarily high for VRT, but State Transportation dollars were used for the project, so investment in park and rides, maintenance facilities or transit centers by entities other than VRT should be weighed carefully and investigated fully, prior to using public dollars for amenities that may not be able to be successful.

VRT should do all in its power to partner successfully with agencies and entities that can assist public transportation, but entities who have a mission to provide education or build roads may not be the best entities to funnel transit dollars to, especially with VRT's need for growth and maintenance back log, especially if those amenities are not in VC 2.0.

e. Commuteride Sites

The ACHD Commuteride system has existed in the valley for many years. It has successfully provided rides to thousands of commuters on a rideshare platform. It has operated with low expenses and effective network ridership as a department of the ACHD.

VRT does not own any of the assets or amenities that are a part of the ACHD Commuteride system, but similar to Boise State, it has assisted ACHD in purchases of vehicles for many years. Large amounts of federal dollars slated for transit purposes in the valley have been used to buy vehicles for the rideshare platform. There is some political background related to ACHD not wanting this high quality system to be watered down, absorbed by or taken over by VRT, but VRT is generally happy assisting ACHD with vehicles in order to keep a good system functional. VRT has never invested in the creation of park and rides or other amenities for ACHD though, but may need to be a part of future property investments to assist with this rideshare system as many park and rides are used by both rideshare platforms and fixed route transit. To truly assist and support all levels of public transportation, VRT should monitor and watch for opportunities to assist with park and ride locations that can benefit the transit network at all levels, including Commuteride sites.

Care should be taken similar to Boise State's maintenance facility to avoid investment of VRT's limited capital resources to assist an organization with a substantially larger budget a resource base than VRT.

ACHD Commuteride has informal simple agreements with numerous private entities to use parking lots as rideshare anchor points. These agreements have taken large amounts of effort to secure, are low cost and simple to create and use, and are a high value asset to public transportation in the valley.

VRT needs to leverage these agreements and spaces for the rideshare and mobility services that VRT provides. Marking all ACHD locations on VRT mapping, opening up VRT's mobility services to all ACHD sites should also be considered for future expansion of public to private partnerships to create first mile last mile connections.

6. Bus Stops

VRT moved from a flag stop to a fixed bus stop transit network in 2008. Prior to that, VRT did not have any fixed and signed bus stops in the valley. Riders simply stood on the side of established bus stops and waved to the bus, allowing it to stop and pick them up at any location along the route.

In 2008 VRT placed signs for the applicable routes at fixed locations on all routes. Generally stops were spaced as close together as every two blocks all the way out to stops spaced up to a half mile apart. Spacing is based upon business or residence density and vehicle speed in the area. These locations were added to VRT's maps and schedule and provided to the public. From that time on VRT has obtained permissions from various entities owning public right of way to build, improve or place bus stops and amenities along VRT routes to aid in the transit network.

These locations require permission from the agencies owning the street right of way where the route travels. This generally means ACHD, ITD or the Cities where service occurs in Canyon County such as Nampa and Caldwell. ACHD and VRT were able to partner on terms to operate in the right of way and place and maintain shelters, benches and other amenities throughout the district. This agreement covers the largest swath of right of way (R/W) that VRT operates in, and while it required multiple years of negotiation and legal assistance, it is generally the most far reaching and helpful agreement VRT works under to provide amenities to the transit network. Some agencies allow VRT to ask for permission prior to placing amenities while others actively move to stop transit amenities from being placed in their space.

VRT has operated as many as nine hundred bus stops on fixed routes in the past but has streamlined that down in past years to seven hundred and fifty active and operating transit stops. These stops can range from the simplest of locations with little more than a bus stop sign on an unimproved shoulder clear up to large and inviting plaza style stops with numerous amenities in place such as benches, shelters, bike racks etc. Generally VRT purchases, provides for and maintains all above ground amenities at bus stops, but some cities have built and provided amenities, then deeded those improvements to VRT once the installation was completed. As VRT does not own any public R/W, it relies heavily on concrete improvements created and built by the owners and controllers of that public space. When those cities or agencies do not create or will not include transit improvements as part of their projects, VRT often has to move in later and improve transit stops with their own limited funds. Some cities provide additional capital project funds to improve bus stops and sometimes VRT uses internal match dollars to create those improvements on its own. Due to VRT's limited budget, it is paramount that any improvements done by others be leveraged to include improvements to help VRT in any way. If the controlling agency can at least create or build the concrete space to make bus stops compliant and inviting, VRT can generally provide and place the benches, shelters or bike racks needed to make a quality and

inviting transit stop. Agencies that review and approve of development of the R/W by private entities can also direct those developers or companies to include transit improvements with their projects as well, but rarely do. Also of note is that in some cases, where an agency controls the R/W that has limited relationship capacity with VRT, staff often find that – even if VRT pays for the improvements – the agency does not support, help or make the process of providing quality transit amenities easy in any way, often seeming to actively prohibit transit use.

VRT has roughly sixty passenger shelters, several hundred benches and various random amenities such as trash cans, bike racks, etc. placed at stops in the valley to date. These amenities are required to be maintained, replaced and kept up by VRT staff or contractors. Of the seven hundred and fifty stops in service, there are currently three hundred and thirty eight that are considered A.D.A. accessible and compliant.

VRT considers a transit stop accessible when an elevated curb is in place for level boarding and wheelchair use, an A.D.A. loading area is provided required to be at least five feet wide by eight feet deep and lastly if the connecting sidewalk in the area leads the transit rider to areas surrounding the stop. While only one of those elements is required in accessibility codes and requirements (the loading area), VRT is moving to actively improve or renovate as many of its existing transit stops as possible to make them accessible according to VRT's definition of accessibility.

VRT has a council that advises the Board and staff on partner agency and public concerns and provides input from special service providers and groups. This group is called the Regional Advisory Council (RAC). In past years staff has worked closely with this group to set goals for the number of amenities in place on VRT routes, as well as the process to score and prioritize improvements and repairs at existing transit stops. The RAC created and approved the VRT definition of accessible and has set goals for accessibility at five hundred and twenty five, or seventy percent of the active stops, whichever is greater. The RAC has also set the shelter and bench goal at one hundred shelters and four hundred benches. VRT needs to work to meet these minimal goals based on guidance and direction from the RAC and the VRT Board.

VRT has also scored its bus stops according to TAM scoring procedures, even though the land and concrete is not owned by VRT. This is because of the possibility of VRT investing in them in the future. These scores are used to prioritize and rank improvements of stops as funds become available, but is not the only factor used in ranking. Also used in prioritizing stop improvements are the stop level ridership available from automatic passenger counters (APC's) on the buses as well as how many routes actively use the stop. A stop that is served by more than one route is considered far more stable and established than a stop served by only one route. Stops that may be canceled moved or adjusted should not be invested in. As such, established stops generally receive a higher priority in the ranking process for improvements.

In order to provide quality transit amenities, VRT needs to move forward with several policy and budget level actions in order to be well positioned for VC 2.0. The first is

including regular capital dollars from contributing agencies annually to improve the transit stops in their jurisdiction. This annual outlay of capital dollars should continue until the transit stops in the area in question have met the accessibility and amenity goals set by the RAC. The second is to always include full cost assessments to every new route created by partner agencies including the cost of amenities built at RAC recommended levels when starting new routes or adding service to existing routes. Lastly, in order to have the improvements come as part of leveraged improvements done by highway districts or cities already doing work in the area, VRT needs to require that all roadway projects completed by agencies other than VRT incorporate VRT's Bus Stop Location and Transit Amenities Development Guidelines (TADG) into their own policies and processes. This can be done by requiring cities and agencies that foster support and provide for transit through funding or other support require the implementation of the TADG processes by all highway districts, private development or other local roadwork projects. If VRT expects to catch up, maintain or stay ahead of the issues involving accessible transit stops, the agencies that create and build pedestrian space throughout the valley will have to be a partner in that effort. It is not possible to achieve the necessary levels of transit stop accessibility required under VC 2.0 in the current situation.

7. Fixed Guideway

a. Bus Rapid Transit

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a mode of transit using large or linked vehicles to provide rail level ridership at high frequency without the high cost of rail R/W and station creation. BRT generally has large and specially branded stations along a BRT specific corridor and operates at frequencies more regular than every fifteen minutes. BRT is a ripe option to provide high levels of service to corridors choked with single occupancy vehicles or areas where light rail construction would not be feasible.

The State Street corridor has been studied numerous times as the most likely initial BRT corridor in the Treasure Valley. The most recent and extensive study approved by the majority of the stakeholders is the State Street Transit and Traffic Operations Plan (TTOP). The TTOP created example cross sections, discussed possible construction schedules and optional funding mechanisms as well as highlighting land use and development concerns and other issues. It studied the section of State Street between 23rd Street and Glenwood in Boise. VRT and the City have also worked to supplement or add to the TTOP by studying Transit Oriented Development (TOD) planning for the corridor, lane use and other factors.

VRT is working to make the TTOP come to fruition with the support of the City and ACHD. Recently the City of Boise has funded extended service hours on the primary State Street routes as well as increasing frequencies to 15 minutes during peak hours, bringing the level of service through that corridor far closer to BRT service levels than any other route in the area. ACHD has also opted to move forward with the intersection reconstruction and widening of many of the major intersections through the area. While these intersections are often designed primarily to ease single occupancy vehicle issues, there is a substantial benefit to VRT that comes with this widening, making the corridor far closer to BRT-ready than it was in years past. Also included in these intersection improvements are often significant concrete space and

area that can be used for future BRT stations. These improvements are often frowned upon as not transit friendly enough, but it is important for VRT stakeholders to recognize the huge level of capital investments ACHD is providing through the area. While not perfectly what VRT would have picked, these projects are a huge asset and move in the right direction to allow BRT or some other level of fixed guideway corridor.

The VC 2.0 growth scenario doesn't limit BRT to just State Street however, directing several other corridors be evaluated for this high level of service including Chinden Blvd, Fairview and Overland in Boise and Garrity and Cleveland in Canyon County. With the Interstate, the rail corridor and the river all cutting the valley horizontally, growth and movement patterns will always require significant east west mobility and these additional corridors should be highlighted wherever possible as the next steps to be undertaken during or after the BRT development on State Street.

In order to make these corridors a reality, the partner agencies for those areas need to be made aware of the plans and needs required to make improvements to corridor space and level of service through these areas. Implementation of transit amenities as part of agency and partner construction projects on those corridors should be required and/fostered wherever possible, leveraging existing work in the area to complete needed improvements prior to implementing those levels of service. It is also vital that existing improvements to service and functionality on BRT corridors as they are created be marketed and branded to improve visibility and awareness.

b. *Circulators/Dedicated Shuttles*

In order to connect high capacity transit routes to residential areas or other local service shuttles, circulators or trolleys have often been used. These types of service often bridge the gap between fixed guideway service such as rail and other levels of service. Circulators work in a similar fashion to provide quick high level of service to areas that are highly congested or difficult to serve with single occupancy vehicles such as college campuses or large business complexes. The City of Boise has long pushed for a downtown circulator to ease congestion in the downtown core and provide quick and easy transportation around, through and in and out of the city center. These services have a vital place in the transit network and future transit mobility plans.

The high cost of rail installation can be mitigated by initially providing an articulated or specially branded transit vehicle in service over the circulator pathway if needed, but rail applications often obtain far higher ridership due to novelty, traveler curiosity and other special branding factors. As far as facilities and infrastructure are concerned, the pathways and expected corridors used for these types of service should be highly monitored through local capital infrastructure projects and development to assure they are built to standards capable of handling this level of service in the future. Corridors in question for this level of service include circulation paths around the downtown such as the Main / Idaho corridors, pathways around Boise State University, the connection from the Boise Depot to downtown and connections to major business and destination centers such as sporting venues such as the Grove Hotel or other major facilities including Micron.

c. Rail

There have been multiple rail studies in past years completed regarding what corridor to focus on, how much rail improvements may cost, and how many citizens should reside in the valley before rail is feasible. All of these studies provide value, but don't necessarily start any physical process of making rail a reality. Whether or not the population or funding support rail improvements, VRT is the regional authority that has the most direct responsibility to provide rail should it be used provide public transportation and has a responsibility to start the process of making rail a reality.

Rail, whether light rail or heavy commuter rail, comes at a huge cost though, making it difficult to justify for a small agency with limited funds. Not having a guaranteed funding source for continued regional rail service also make the process of starting the procurement of rail R/W seem like a foolish way to spend VRT's limited funds. But other efforts not depending on funds, wherever possible, should be undertaken. VRT has already started the process of focusing transit property purchases at locations near rail corridors, such as the Meridian Administration Facility, the CWI Park and Ride and the HDTC. Additional tasks, such as beginning discussions with rail corridor owners, can and should be started wherever possible.

Whichever option between heavy rail and light rail is more feasible, VRT should do all in its power to make the process shovel ready once funding or support is available. Protecting, reserving or purchasing assets at or on rail R/W should always be considered, as well as reaching out to start any and all necessary discussions with the rail corridor owner.

8. Future Steps and Remaining Questions

It is unclear what processes may be missing from this effort, especially having watched the societal and policy changes VRT has encountered in the past decade. When VRT was formed in 1999, it is doubtful that any of the forming members thought that over twenty years would pass away without a dedicated funding source being provided through legislation from the state or otherwise. Also difficult to foresee would be the societal changes relating to renewable energy, shared mobility devices (scooters and bikes) and smartphones and the associated pay and mapping applications.

VRT should continue to remain as flexible as possible as it manages infrastructure and assets in order to be well positioned to face upcoming changes. What is simple to see is that transit and public transportation is posed to grow significantly in the Treasure Valley along with the significant expected growth of the population in the valley. VRT is in a good position to make use of opportunities in place today such as property acquisition, right of way reservation and other conservative future plans. While it is unclear which partners will fund transit service and at what levels, it is not in question whether or not transit service will be of value to the public in the two county area.